

HAWAIIAN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION: OPENING THE DOORS

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"Let's teach about Hawai'i!!..." . This sounds like a simple enough task except if you want to go beyond the "HVB syndrome". In teaching about Hawai'i you face a two-headed hydra. One head is mute and the other speaks only "Scienese". And while the number of Hawaiian urbanites grows; cultural activists, environmentalists and scientists jump up and down about the degradation of the Hawaiian environment. So what's the fuss about? Haaywaae is sunshine, surf and pakalolo. What is disturbing, is that misconceptions are cultivated, perpetuated and MOST gratingly there is little communication done about the Hawaiian environment.

It is not unusual to speak to a group of students, three quarters of whom have been to Disneyland but have never experienced a fresh Hawaiian stream. It is not unusual to have people more concerned over the plight of a condor than a Hawaiian honeycreeper. After a year of formally teaching from pre-school to adult levels as a resource person on Hawaiian environment and culture, I would like to share some of my insights in hopes that they may open the doors.

First of all, why? Why should we teach about the environment? Why should we teach about Hawai'i? As an opening premise, awareness of the environment is as old as the human race. In order to survive humans have depended on a cunning perception of their environment. The weather, the topography, the plants and animals; all these encompass the very core of man's basic needs. Even thousands of years later, when man has learned to create and alter environments to fit his tastes, he is still dependant on earth, light, air and water. We can not deny our dependance...yet... so perhaps we should learn to at least appreciate these very basic resources. This is the basis for environmental education. Understanding our environment so that we may live with it.

Now to take this one step further, why teach about Hawai'i? Well for one reason, we live on islands not continents. It is good to teach global aspects like the phenomena of the seasons but what about having some tangible examples. Examples that our students can experience, and perhaps through that experience learn to appreciate. It is sad but true that most students learn about robins and blue jays rather than 'apapane. Our students might be "apathetic" toward environmental issues because tangible examples are not given to them.

So now that we have some reason for teaching about the Hawaiian environment, what is done to implement this? A basic first step should be to set down some goals and objectives. There are a number of agencies and organizations that support varying forms of environmental education but without a consensus among these groups on goals and objectives, education is inconsistent. Often times environmental education is a by-product of political activism rather than a basis for it. Once this is set up we can begin to teach in a direction.

Though, before we can teach, we have to learn. How do we find out about Hawai'i? There is a good deal of information but where is it or who knows about? Here is

a problem of accessibility. The resources are available but how do we get to it? Information has to get out to the public if their consciousness is to be raised.

So what's next? COMMUNICATION. "Scienese" is fine for communicating to other scholars but the rest of the world is left in the cold. Concepts can be taught with simple but accurate analogies.

These are the basic pitfalls for teaching about the Hawai'i in Hawai'i. I feel that before you can say people don't care to know, they should be offered the option to be able to learn. Very simply, they haven't been offered that.. yet...